

Montgomery County Council to block Leggett's \$4m Costco deal

By: [Brian Hughes](#) 04/18/11 8:05 PM

Montgomery County Council members have quietly formed a coalition to block a \$4 million grant to lure big-box retailer Costco to Wheaton, effectively gutting the centerpiece of a push by County Executive Ike Leggett to revitalize the area amid concerns about lavishing major retailers with taxpayer dollars while slashing public services.

Leggett pushed the contentious deal through the previous council, saying the sweetener was needed to transform a pocket riddled with strip malls, shuttered stores and an array of economic ventures that never materialized.

Leggett placed the funding in his proposed budget beginning next fiscal year. And now, the majority of the council is against the multimillion-dollar grant to bring Costco to the Westfield Wheaton Shopping Mall.

"Westfield Mall has gazillions of dollars," said Councilman Marc Elrich, D-at large. "The idea we're giving them \$4 million more -- no way. They're going to make a freaking fortune on Costco. They need to suck it up and deal with it."

Behind the scenes, Leggett has been lobbying council members opposed to the deal, furious they would even consider backing out of the agreement with Westfield, according to multiple county officials.

Leggett has said Costco would generate more than \$1 million annually for the county's tax coffers.

However, council members said they simply could not justify the expense amid substantial cutbacks in transportation, public safety, and parks and libraries.

"I know that it would be a challenge for me to support something I felt was a misuse of taxpayer dollars, even if the previously council did it," said Councilman Craig Rice, D-Germantown, who added he would vote against the grant.

Patrick Lacefield, a spokesman for Leggett, said abandoning the subsidy would put the Costco deal "in jeopardy" and undermine the county's credibility with investors.

"We have moved ahead on this," he said. "This would require us to break a deal. This is not a money taker from the county. What you have to do in times like this -- you have to make investments."

Some nearby residents and county planners have balked at the deal, arguing the bulk-goods retailer would add urban sprawl rather than foster a walkable community near a Metro station.

For their part, Costco's backers expect the deal to go forward.

"The agreement is in place, and was negotiated in good faith," said Westfield spokeswoman Katy Dickey. "The expectation is that the county will follow through on its promise."